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# HSB STUDIES

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## FOCUS . . . TEENAGE PREGNANCIES NORTH CAROLINA, 1973-1977

Widespread concern about the social, economic and health consequences of teenage pregnancy has led to a statewide effort to reduce these pregnancies. This report focuses on the recent childbearing and abortion patterns of North Carolina resident teenagers.

Although births to teenagers have decreased in recent years, the total number of pregnancies has not changed. The birth decrease has occurred simultaneously with an increase in abortion; however, this does not imply that a single abortion accounts for each averted birth. To the contrary, because abortions enable women to return to the fertile state sooner than if they had carried their pregnancies to term, more than one abortion is required to replace one live birth. It has been estimated that net births averted per abortion vary from 0.45 to 0.90 depending on assumptions about the efficiency of accompanying contraception, the timing of abortions and the age at which a woman starts family limitations. (1,2)

The age group 15-19 has been identified as a distinct group of females, composed of school-age girls of childbearing age, and will be used in this report. Although pregnancies do occur to girls under 15 years old, there is no detailed discussion of pregnancies among the 10-14 age group in this report because the rates are very low and data do not support a detailed analysis.

Although this report does not attempt to explain or account for the recent trends in teenage pregnancy, it does present and describe the available statistics. These data document some of the less fortunate circumstances which accompany birth to a girl 15-19 years old; such a birth is more likely to be illegitimate, of low birthweight, and to a mother who received inadequate prenatal care.

### Births and Birth Rates

In 1977, a total of 17,778 babies were born to mothers aged 15-19 years. This compares to 21,883 in 1973 (3). Both whites and nonwhites contributed to this decrease with the relative decrease being somewhat larger for whites.

The birth rate for teenaged girls in North Carolina was 83.7 per 1,000 population in 1973. In the past 4 years the rate has declined steadily to a low of 68.2 in 1977. Table 1 shows the 1973-1977 race-specific birth rates for this age group.

Data in this table indicate that birth rates for white and nonwhite teenagers declined considerably from 1973 to 1977, and the race differential increased slightly.

Figure 1  
Resident Birth, Abortion, Fetal and  
Total Pregnancy Rates per 1,000 Population Aged 15-19  
North Carolina, 1973-1977

